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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the development and implementation of a teacher reward system based on merit that was used at the University of Nebraska. Explained are the organizational set-up of the program into operational groups and their responsibilities and the steps taken to establish interest and commitment in the project. Also discussed is the determination of what to reward and the evaluation mechanisms, such as peer evaluations and classroom observation by trained observers, that are being encouraged. It is noted that thus far, a renewed interest in teaching among faculty and administrators has developed, teaching initiatives are being started, and institutional problems with the reward system structure are being identified and solved. The model used for rewarding teaching has been found to be effective. The program is planned for continued use and development by the 28 school departments now using it, and preparations are underway to assist other universities (18 universities have expressed interest) across the nation through a dissemination grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. (GLR)

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Implementing An Institutional Change Model for Rewarding Teaching At Research-Oriented Universities

A Paper for

The Symposium: Achieving Parity in Reward Structures for Teaching at Research Institutions

Presented at

American Educational Research Association Meeting

San Francisco, California

By

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Implementing An Institutional Change Model for Rewarding Teaching At Research-Oriented Universities

Background

Since the release of the 1990 Carnegie Foundation for Teaching Report, The New American Scholar, faculties and administrators in higher education across the country are more vigorously discussing the issue of how to reward teaching. The pendulum that swung toward the research agenda is now beginning to move toward teaching. This awakening interest in teaching was noted in a 1990 Syracuse University study of institutions across the country. Surprisingly, faculty and administrators agreed that teaching was important and more emphasis should be placed on it.

In 1987 a group of faculty at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln got together to explore the possibilities of how teaching could be improved through a better reward system. This small group was made up of faculties from the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and the College of Arts and Sciences. Historically, these two colleges have worked together on other projects, but both were from quite different cultures and two different campuses.

This group called themselves the "Teaching Community," and they were seeking ways to improve the reward structure for teaching. They recognized early, as a result of conversations with administrators, that if teaching was to be rewarded with merit, promotion and tenure, more evidence of teaching effectiveness was needed beyond student evaluations. As this small faculty group discussed the reward issues, they more clearly began to understand the enormity of the problem. They developed a proposal for the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) that addressed improvement of teaching and reward. Several reviewers of the project and some FIPSE board members were not sure this problem could be solved using the proposed Nebraska plan. FIPSE did not grant the full proposal but did provide $12,000 to allow the Nebraska group to refine their plan.

During 1987-88, the Nebraska plan "Building a Teaching Community" took shape as faculty and administration discussed the issue. Two faculty leaders emerged, Robert Narveson, English, and Leverne Barrett, Agricultural Education. Two deans met regularly with the faculty and provided encouragement, Steve Hilliard from Arts and Sciences and Ted Hartung from Agriculture. After a year of planning, a new proposal to FIPSE was written and submitted. Dean Ted Hartung was so convinced with this idea that he proposed that if FIPSE did not fund the project, the College of Agriculture would try to 'go it alone'. The project was not funded by FIPSE.

Following rejection by FIPSE, the 'Teaching Community' met to determine next steps; some felt that it was time to call it quits, but the two deans said, try it one more time. A new proposal was drafted that refined the original goals. The proposal had two goals: 1) to change institutional norms and values for teaching, and 2) to develop a process model for rewarding teaching. This proposal had the full support of University administration at all levels. This new proposal "From Regard to Reward: Rewarding Teaching at Research-Oriented Universities" was funded for a three-year period.

Organization for Change

To achieve project goals, three groups were established. A project leadership team was made up of co-directors from both colleges and a resource person from the UNL Teaching and Learning Center. The responsibilities of this group expanded as the project grew, but mainly they planned events, administered programs and brainstormed strategies.

The second group was the departmental leadership team made up of the department head or chair, a project coordinator (person respected by faculty) and the chairperson of the promotion and tenure committee. This team's tasks were to: 1) survey faculty perceptions of the reward structure for teaching in their own department and college, 2) study literature on evaluation, 3) plan faculty events to discuss how teaching could be better rewarded by merit, promotion and tenure, and 4) develop a plan for evaluation and reward specific for their discipline and seek faculty consensus.

The third group was the administrative leadership team made up of vice-chancellors from each campus, deans from each college, department heads, and FIPSE project staff. The main tasks of this group were to provide support morally and financially for project activities; identify institutional barriers that may prevent teaching reward, and develop strategies to change the reward system.

Action Steps to Create Change

The first challenge of the project leadership team was to identify departments willing to be the first 'guinea pigs'. In consultation with administration, it was concluded that it would be best to select four departments that had a strong history of regard for teaching. Two departments from each colleges were selected: from Arts and Sciences, English (55 faculty members of professional rank) and Psychology (25 faculty); from Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, Agronomy (60 faculty) and Agricultural Education (8 faculty).

Invitations to the project were begun in August. This process of invitation was followed in subsequent years. Each vice chancellor sent a letter to each member of the Departmental Leadership Team stating the importance of their leadership role and inviting them to the August meeting and workshop. In addition, the chancellor invited a select cadre of department opinion leaders to the meeting. After the orientation meeting, the Departmental Leadership Team participated in a workshop that explained project goals, resources and expectations. One of the tangible results requested from departments was a plan detailing how the department would more effectively measure and reward effective teaching.

After the August workshop, a typical sequence of events went as follows: September - faculty in the department were surveyed (using provided questionnaire) about perceptions of the reward process; October - survey data was analyzed and interpreted to staff. This was done in small meetings or by way of retreats. A workshop for the departmental and administrative teams was held to provide information, solve identified problems and give encouragement. In November and December first drafts of departmental plans to address reward issues were made. During January and February, plans were refined and submitted to the faculty for approval. In March, departmental teams and the administrative leadership team met to 'officially hear' the presentations of reward plans. The remainder of the year was spent refining the plan and taking steps to put the plan into policy and action.

After the first year, interest and enthusiasm for the goals of the project increased. This was due in part to the full acceptance and support of the University administration. Through meetings, news media and informal conversation, faculty began to take notice of the project. During the second year eight new departments, four from each College, joined the effort (Geology, Mathematics, Music, Political Science, Biometry, Plant Pathology, Animal Sciences, and Biological Systems Engineering).

The third year was the easiest year for recruitment of new departments. Three new colleges (Dentistry, Engineering and

Teachers) joined Agriculture and Arts/Sciences with a total of sixteen new departments (Adult Restorative Dentistry, Agricultural Communications, Agricultural Economics, Anthropology, Art/Art History, Biological Sciences, Curriculum/Instruction, Food Sciences, Forestry, Fisheries & Wildlife, Geography, History, Horticulture, Industrial Engineering, Sociology, Special Education, Veterinary Sciences). This was an easier year for recruitment because the change process was now beginning to be institutionalized. Vice chancellors and deans were now enthusiastic supporters and they encouraged department chairs.

One challenge the project faced was that of maintaining momentum with departments who developed plans in the first year. Encouragement and communication was done by having periodic meetings with department chairs and meetings with departmental project coordinators. Sometimes these meetings were hosted by project staff and at other times by deans. At these meetings the question was asked: How is your plan to reward teaching coming along in the implementation process?

Determining What to Reward

One of the first hurdles to be crossed in changing the reward structure for teaching was that of determining what to reward. Other questions asked were: 1) Is teaching a scholarly activity, 2) How much should teaching count for promotion/tenure decisions, 3) How can teaching effectiveness be measured beyond student evaluations. These and many other issues were debated in faculty meetings across campus.

Not long after the project began it was evident that if teaching was to be rewarded, more evidence than student evaluations was needed. This message was made clearer through the results of the faculty surveys and deans comments. Also evaluation practices would need to vary significantly from discipline to discipline. After surveying faculty, it was evident that faulty did not perceive teaching to be as well rewarded as was research. This finding occurred department by department, college by college. A department's own survey results was strong evidence that changes needed to be made.

Although all departments in the project still use student evaluations, a wide array of other evidence in the form of portfolios is being encouraged. Here is a sampling of methods of evaluation used: Classroom observation by trained observers, department heads and peers; Peer evaluation of course syllabi, exams, tests; Self-evaluations, and activities identified that would be considered scholarly work in teaching.

Results

The first and least tangible result is that faculty and administrators are talking about teaching more than ever before; some hope has been generated. Teaching initiatives have begun from the president down to the deans' levels. Twenty-eight departments in five colleges have approved plans on how they will reward teaching with merit, promotion and tenure.

Institutional problems with the reward structure have been identified and solutions are being sought. Some problems such as balancing the merit system by job assignment may be easier than changing crowded classroom situations. Increasing news coverage of teaching activity of faculty is easier than breaking the practice of awarding promotion and tenure based on publication.

One of the most significant results is that a rewarding teaching institutional change process model has evolved and proven itself to work. That process simply stated is empowered faculty working with willing administrators who have resources to solve complex problems thought to be unsolvable.

Future

The prospects for good teaching to be rewarded at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln are very bright. The twenty-eight departments will continue to perfect their reward plans and faculty and administration will continue to work on unsolved problems. There are still many departments and colleges at UNL that need to participate and plans for complete institutionalization are underway with the creation of a follow-up leadership team that has financial support from the University chancellor.

Preparations are underway to assist Universities across the nation to solve their rewarding teaching problems through a dissemination grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). At this point eighteen institutions have expressed a strong interest in joining with UNL, they are: University of Alaska-Fairbanks, California Polytechnic Institute, University of Colorado-Boulder, Iowa State University, Kansas State University, University of Minnesota, University of Missouri-Columbia, North Carolina A & T, North Carolina State University, North Dakota State University, Oklahoma State University, Oregon State University, Pennsylvania State University, Purdue University, Rutgers University, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Wayne State College, and the University of Cincinnati.

Cooperating institutions will be assisted by the University of Nebraska staff through conferences, on-site visits by teams and follow-up with teleconferences.

Much has yet to be done to change institutions so that teaching is more fairly rewarded. This change process will gradually occur as a result of renewed national awareness, public scrutiny and teaching faculty and administrators working together.